We have packaged all these RFCs to make available on the Boardwatch BBS in the Internet file area under **PEM-RFC.ZIP** and **MIME-RFC.ZIP.**

USENET ORACLE - WHIMSICAL KNOW-IT-ALL OF THE INTERNET

by Kevin Savetz

Have you talked to the Usenet Oracle? He can answer all of your important questions: "What's the meaning of life? Where does the dryer put the socks it steals from the wash? How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?" Or, he could <ZOT> you into a smoldering pile of ashes. Either way, he's a great guy.

The Usenet Oracle isn't really a person. It's an electronic mail service run by Steve Kinzler, a graduate student and systems administrator at Indiana University. Send the Oracle your question, and within a few hours, you'll receive an answer from the all-knowing one.

The Oracle is a cooperative effort for creative humor. When you send a question to the Oracle server, your message is actually forwarded to someone else who uses the program. He or she mails a (hopefully witty) answer back to the Oracle server, which forwards it to you. Thanks to the server program, all of this is done anonymously - the questioner (or "supplicant") and the answerer (that is, the Oracle incarnate) never know who each other are.

The Oracle started as a program running on an Indiana University computer system. The program became popular, so Kinzler, with the help of hacker Ray Moody, created a network version of the service. The best questions and answers - as selected by volunteer "priests" - are distributed in "Oracularity digests" on the Usenet group "rec.humor.oracle." Oracularities on that group are read by an estimated 26,000 people. Over 700 additional readers (who presumably can not access the Usenet) subscribe to the Oracle mailing list, receiving the Oracularities via e-mail. To date, over 10,000 people have participated by sending in a question or an answer.

Over time, the Oracle has developed his own personality. Writers incarnated as the Oracle often blend in known aspects of his persona: an inflated ego, a sense of humor, his girlfriend Lisa, and the propensity to <ZOT> his less fortunate supplicants.

Why did Kinzler start the Oracle? "Well, it was fun most of the time. Challenging frequently from a programming and system design perspective. But mostly it was that typical hacker's motivation: when a great idea comes along, it just deserves to be done. I thought an e-mail Oracle was a great idea, had the resources and desire to do it, and so I did it. Part of my interest in the Oracle was experimental - I wanted to see what would come of it, what people would do with an interactive, anonymous system like this."

Kinzler (kinzler@cs.indiana.edu) calls the anonymous mail aspect of the Oracle server a crucial aspect of its popularity. "Anonymity gives more people the security to try to be witty or funny in their creative writing. I hope to include people who discover through the Oracle they can and can enjoy writing creatively. And the Oracle gives them a guaranteed audience of two, and, if they're lucky, maybe tens of thousands."

For more information about the Usenet Oracle, send electronic mail to "oracle@cs.indiana.edu" with a subject line of "help." To ask a question, the subject line should include the words "tell me" and the body of the message should contain your question. (If you don't grovel to the sometimes-egotistic Oracle, you may find that you've been <ZOT>ted to oblivion, so you may want to pander to his ego!) You should receive an answer in a day or two, probably much sooner.

Once you ask a question, the Oracle may ask you to answer somebody else's question, as a sort of payment for services. You should respond with the most witty answer possible, so that the supplicant feels gratified in his or her quest for knowledge. If you can't think of a worthy reply, do nothing and the question will be sent to someone else. If you wish to answer a question without asking one, just send a message to the Oracle server with a subject line of "ask me."

If you don't have access to "rec.humor.oracle" and would like to receive the Oracularities, send mail to "oracle-request@cs.indiana.edu." To get on the distribution list, include a subject line of "subscribe"; to remove yourself from the list of recipients, put "unsubscribe" in the subject line.

[Kevin M. Savetz is a recent graduate from Humboldt University living in Arcata California. He needs a job. He can be reached at savetz@rahul.net]

BBS LEGISLATIVE WATCH

AREAS TO WATCH IN THE NEXT CONGRESS

by Shari Steele

Last month, I highlighted legislation that had been considered by the 102nd Congress. This month, I would like to tell you about some legislation that is likely to be introduced in the upcoming Congress.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE TO BE DEBATED

When Congress ended its session last year, several bills were being considered by various committees regarding the orderly development of a telecommunications infrastructure, or a national network for communicating with data and video as well as voice. We expect the 103rd Congress to pick up the infrastructure debate right where the 102nd Congress left off. EFF is excited about this, because one of the bills, that to be introduced by Representative Edward Markey (D-MA), chair of the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance, incorporates EFF's Open Platform proposal.

EFF's Open Platform proposal is one of the most significant civil liberties initiatives on which we work. The future of